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International institutional arrangements related to environment and sustainable development

Report of the Secretary-General**

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* A/55/251.

** The present report was delayed in its submission owing to the need for extensive consultations between convention secretariats, the United Nations Environment Programme and the Secretariat, and so as to include information on recent meetings of relevance to this matter.

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I. Introduction

1. In its Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, adopted at its nineteenth special session in 1997,[1] the General Assembly stressed that, given the increasing number of decision-making bodies concerned with various aspects of sustainable development, including international environmental and environment-related conventions, there was need for improved policy coordination at the intergovernmental level and for continued and more concerted efforts to enhance collaboration among the secretariats of those decision-making bodies. The Assembly further recommended that the conference of the parties to the conventions signed at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) or as a result of it and to other conventions related to sustainable development should cooperate to explore ways and means of collaborating in their work to advance the effective implementation of the conventions. The present report considers cooperation in implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa (UNCCD), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and a number of other environment-related conventions.

2. The comprehensive and effective implementation of conventions and their various protocols depends, to a large extent, on sound cooperation among organizations in the various fields of actions. Thus, the development of complementarities among conventions and other entities is central to the activities of the convention secretariats. In this regard, significant progress has taken place since 1997, as reflected in two previous reports of the Secretary-General, to the fifty-third and fifty-fourth sessions of the General Assembly (A/53/477 and A/54/468). In his report to the fifty-third session, the Secretary-General referred to the ways and means of undertaking the review of progress made in implementing conventions related to sustainable development. The report addressed the issue of coherence among environmental and environment-related conventions at both the inter-agency and intergovernmental level and proposed elements of an intergovernmental process that the Assembly might take into consideration in determining how such a review could be carried out.

3. In its resolution 53/186, the Assembly took note of the report and requested the Secretary-General to identify actions undertaken to implement part IV.A, in particular paragraph 119, of the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, as well as the areas requiring further consideration and work. In his report to the fifty-fourth session, the Secretary-General highlighted the growing recognition within the United Nations system of the linkages between various environmental areas and the significant collaborative work already undertaken by the convention secretariats in response to the need for policy coherence. The report provided an overview of the progress made in understanding ecological linkages and in the responses by the United Nations system and at the intergovernmental level which have given further guidance to enhancing coordination between the environmental and environment-related conventions.

4. At its fifty-fourth session, the General Assembly, in resolution 54/217, took note with appreciation of the report of the Secretary-General (A/54/468) and the progress made in the implementation of its resolution 53/186. The Assembly, in paragraph 5 of resolution 54/217, encouraged the secretariats of the various environmental and environment-related conventions and international organizations, with full respect for the status of the secretariats of the conventions and the autonomous decision-making prerogatives of the conferences of the parties to the conventions concerned, to strengthen cooperation with a view to facilitating progress in the implementation of those conventions at the international, regional and national levels by:

(a) Identifying opportunities for complementarity of activities undertaken to facilitate the implementation of commitments made by the parties to the various conventions;

(b) Encouraging the carrying out of further scientific analyses by relevant international organizations, such as the United Nations Environment Programme, the secretariats of the conventions, their subsidiary bodies, the United Nations Secretariat and relevant international scientific bodies, in order to identify possible activities with potential multiple benefits and to bring them to the attention of the conferences of the parties;

(c) Promoting more effective and coherent support from international organizations and financial

institutions and mechanisms for national action aimed at the implementation of the conventions, in particular in the area of capacity-building;

(d) Addressing practical issues, such as more effective exchange of information, enhanced awareness-raising and streamlining of national reporting;

(e) Supporting, upon request, efforts being made at the national level towards adopting an integrated and holistic approach to the implementation of environmental and environment-related conventions;

(f) Bringing relevant issues to the attention of the General Assembly and relevant intergovernmental bodies for the consideration of Member States and the formulation of agreed policy recommendations, with a view to promoting a more holistic approach.

5. In response to the recommendations of the Assembly, the present report provides an overview of recent actions taken by the convention secretariats and relevant organizations to maximize benefits from complementarities in the implementation of the conventions related to environment and sustainable development. The report does not list exhaustively the activities and coordination efforts between and among the various convention secretariats and organizations but seeks to highlight the translation of potential synergies into concrete actions and more efficient ways to achieve the objectives of the conventions and sustainable development, especially at the national and local levels. The report demonstrates that coordinated implementation of the environmental conventions is essential at the local level, where it is possible to make a significant difference and where tangible benefits are not only easily achievable but also demonstrable.

6. Also, pursuant to paragraph 5 (f) of resolution 54/217, the present report brings to the attention of the Assembly the emerging issues of common concern for global and regional agreements, such as the critical cross-cutting issue of trade and environment, including the interface between, and implications of, trade regimes and negotiations in the context of the efficient and effective implementation of multilateral environmental agreements. The report aims at providing the Assembly with a greater understanding and awareness of the complex trade and environment interlinkages on which fair and environmentally sustainable policies and trade flows are built.

II. Maximizing benefits from complementarities in the implementation of the conventions

7. In his report on international institutional arrangements related to environment and development (A/54/468), the Secretary-General highlighted the scientific and conceptual approaches to interlinkages between environmental and environment-related conventions. The report outlined that the global environmental challenges — namely, loss of biological diversity, climate change, ozone depletion, desertification, deforestation, regional seas, freshwater, persistent organic pollutants, and hazardous wastes — are closely interlinked through a complex series of physical, chemical and biological processes. The UNEP Global Environmental Outlook 2000 (GEO-2000) report concluded that these processes are also connected by the same driving forces: rising consumption, persistent poverty, population growth, and the use of unsustainable technologies.

8. Policy makers and experts increasingly emphasize the need for integrated responses to these issues and greater awareness and understanding of the linkages between measures adopted under the individual conventions. Policies adopted in response to one issue may support — or in certain instances — undermine those adopted in response to another.

9. With a greater understanding of the linkages, policies, programmes and projects are increasingly focusing on the close interrelation between environmental challenges. Activities range from international research with global orientation to local community-based projects. The need to address these phenomena in an interrelated manner in the implementation process of the three conventions (UNFCCC, UNCCD, CBD) has been recognized and has led, for example, in the context of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), to multifocal projects.

10. The rationale to promote and enhance synergies among the three conventions includes the following facts:

(a) They share the sustainable development approach, embodied in the UNCED process, as articulated in Agenda 21,[2] and the basic principles enshrined in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development;[3]

(b) Th ... subjects — biological diversity, climate change and desertification — are intimately related on ecological, socio-economic and institutional grounds. Several of the policies and measures suggested for achieving the objectives of one convention may also contribute to objectives of the others;

(c) Often national decision makers and policy makers responsible for the implementation of the three conventions belong to the same governmental ministry or to ministries dealing with closely related portfolios;

(d) Their flexible secretariat arrangements allow for a rapid and effective team effort upon which to build a long-term process.

11. Synergistic initiatives that take advantage of and build upon links among the environment-related conventions and that add value to their individual implementation processes could also become instrumental in gradually developing partnerships, common approaches and greater collaboration among other international instruments dealing with subjects relevant to sustainable development. Such a process could take into account the following issues:

(a) The process should be country-driven, with the clear goal of assisting countries in their efforts to pursue sustainable development policies, such as sustainable dryland management, and facilitating the further exploration of relevant linkages between conventions by governmental agencies;

(b) The need to further explore the suggestion made in 1998 by the African Ministerial Conference on Environment Special Consultation on the UNFCCC and its Kyoto Protocol that synergistic effects among the environment-related conventions could be maximized through the adoption of subregional and regional projects and programmes.

12. While there is great potential for enhancing effective cooperation between the conventions related to environment and sustainable development, there are capacity constraints, particularly in developing countries, hindering the ability to reap benefits from synergies. Most convention-related activities, in particular those of a multidisciplinary nature, are relatively new to most countries. The required collaboration among agencies and ministries remains a challenge, especially in cases where institutional and human resources are scarce. In addition, all of the conventions are of quite recent origin, with a limited number of examples or models to build upon. Therefore, further priority should be accorded by the secretariats of the different conventions to promoting synergies in policy-making as a prerequisite for developing coordinated approaches at the field level.

13. One first and promising step towards such an integrated approach has been made in the management of information received from parties as a result of their commitments under environmental conventions. An electronic "synergy forum" has been established to improve and facilitate the interaction and exchange of information among the three convention secretariats. The synergy forum has the potential to evolve and expand in order to bring together other organizations. A joint web page has also been created, which, it is hoped, will be the basis of a joint identity. The relevant information units in the secretariats have developed close working links and meet on a regular basis.

14. Since 1982 UNEP activities in environmental law have been organized and coordinated through two sequential Montevideo Programmes for the Development and Periodic Review of Environmental Law. In 1999, by its decision 20/3, the UNEP Governing Council requested the UNEP Executive Director to undertake a process for the preparation of a new programme for the development and periodic review of environmental law, in consultation with Governments and relevant organizations.

15. In an effort to identify priorities and provide a timely opportunity to contribute to the promotion of synergies, UNEP has started the third review of the Montevideo Programme for the Development and Periodic Review of Environmental Law (Montevideo Programme III). The overall objective of the review is to increase the effectiveness of environmental law in helping to protect and preserve the global environment and promote sustainable development.

16. The Montevideo Programme III is based on an approach that relies on the contributions and perspectives of different disciplines and techniques. Implementation of the Programme should take into account driving forces of environmental change, such as poverty, globalization and trade liberalization.

17. Such an approach will enable UNEP to address environmental issues within a framework that takes advantage of linkages between scientific, economic and other policy perspectives in developing legal and

institutional responses under the respective component of the Programme. It will also assist UNEP in its efforts to increase the integration of the environmental dimension of sustainable development into the programmes of the United Nations system and to make the most effective use of contributions from organizations, institutions and groups outside the United Nations, which can act as partners in the task of developing and implementing environmental law.

18. The proposed components of the Montevideo Programme III identify priorities for action in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The UNEP Governing Council at its twenty-first session and the upcoming review of the implementation of Agenda 21, 10 years after its adoption, would provide an opportunity for concrete actions to be taken on a number of priority components, including those relating to implementation, capacity-building, the prevention and mitigation of environmental damage, and compensation and other redress for any such damage.

19. Also, in an effort to build bridges for environmental and environment-related conventions to achieve common goals, UNEP is bringing experts together to explore innovative ideas. In July 1999, UNEP convened the second meeting of Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans in The Hague. One of the main objectives of the meeting was to strengthen the linkages that Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans have with global conventions and agreements. Among numerous recommendations, the meeting proposed that collaboration between the Convention on International Trade and Endangered Species (CITES) and the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans be strengthened, especially in the case of those regional agreements that manage specially protected areas and wildlife protocols.

20. In October 1999, UNEP organized two expert meetings involving the secretariats and the scientific and technical subsidiary bodies of multilateral environmental agreements. The first, the Consultative Meeting on Collaboration among Multilateral Environmental Conventions, discussed how best to cooperate on issues of common interest. The participants agreed that the process started by the meeting could provide a basis for ongoing consultations, especially at an informal level.

21. The second meeting was called to assess the need, from a scientific and policy perspective, for a follow-up report to *Protecting Our Planet, Securing Our Future: Linkages between Global Environmental Issues and Human Needs*.[4] The meeting concluded that a second assessment would be useful if it were focused, led to practical outcomes, and complemented other ongoing assessment activities. There was strong support for regional assessments with both a development and an environmental focus. The need for methodological tools for implementing the resulting recommendations was stressed. It was observed that the activities under the second interlinkages assessment should be carried out as discrete components of the proposed Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, which would involve the United Nations family and other major international bodies and conventions.

22. The secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), concerned that coordination and synergy are unlikely to result in benefits unless directed towards specific goals, favoured the exploration of options for taking advantage of potential synergy at the field and community levels, with a view to targeting a strategy for combating desertification in ways that would address the core areas of other conventions. UNCCD is implemented at the field level in such a way that it may complement the implementation of other conventions. This in turn facilitates the mobilization of support for the implementation of UNCCD. Thus, combating desertification is "synergized" by addressing the subject matters of other conventions.

23. Combating desertification can be effected in ways that also achieve the objectives of CBD, UNFCCC, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat, and the Forest Principles,[5] and provide an immediate tangible benefit to local populations. The envisaged strategy for combating desertification should not attempt to make drylands function as non-dryland ecosystems but, rather, should identify dryland attributes that can be harnessed to provide dryland inhabitants with an economic competitive advantage. The dryland curses of intense solar radiation, high temperatures, low-quality water, and desolation and wilderness can be turned into the blessings of solar energy, winter cash-crops, aquaculture and ecotourism, respectively. All these can be produced in drylands at lower economic and environmental costs than in non-drylands.

24. A proposed option to combat desertification should be matched with the ecological as well as the socio-economic environment for which that option is most likely to result in sustainability. Many such options constitute alternative livelihoods that relieve much of the pressure on the dryland soil and water resources. Thus, dryland populations can implement practices that not only combat desertification but also mitigate climate change and conserve biodiversity. They should be assisted in publicizing their activities and successes so as to encourage other beneficiaries to reward them for their contributions beyond the local desertification issues.

25. Though confined to countries with drylands, desertification has indirect but strong transboundary effects. Since desertification of the drylands is expected to be exacerbated by global climate change, it is beneficial for dryland populations to take action to reduce the threat to their land from climate change. By the same token, local desertification may contribute to global climate change and may harm biodiversity of both local and global significance. Hence it is in the interest of non-dryland countries to assist affected countries in their struggle against local desertification. The cost of combating desertification in pursuing the objectives of the CBD and the UNFCCC may be low compared to the global benefits of this synergy.

26. When an affected country links measures to combat desertification with measures to sequester carbon and conserve biodiversity, it reaps benefits for itself that should justify the invested costs. However, since these linkages can also benefit other countries, through averting direct and indirect detrimental cross-boundary effects and since, often, incremental costs have been invested, these measures could be supported by the benefiting countries, thus "synergizing" UNCCD implementation, pursuant to the new desertification-related policies of the GEF. The role played by the GEF and its implementing agencies — UNEP, the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank — in the UNCCD, by virtue of operating the conventions' financial mechanisms, remains one of the most important examples of cooperation among conventions.

27. Both convention parties and secretariats should look for partners that would also benefit from efforts in support of a convention and that are already developing approaches which could contribute to a synergistic approach to field implementation. Concerted effort will be required to harmonize and integrate the work of these partners, so that the synergy in their work will facilitate field implementation, through the proposed framework of action plans for synergies.

III. Recent activities in intersecretariat cooperation

A. Desertification/biological diversity

28. Accelerated soil erosion and loss of biodiversity in dry and sub-humid areas negatively affects the socio-economic conditions of the affected populations. An integrated approach to reversing dryland degradation is required. Scientifically based assessments are necessary to quantify the impact of land degradation and loss of productivity of the dry and sub-humid lands and the associated loss of biodiversity. The people living in dry and sub-humid land areas depend on certain biological resources as a means of livelihood, and any threats to those resources tend to undermine the basis of their existence, as communities become more and more vulnerable to future incidences of drought.

29. It is imperative not only to encourage sustainable livelihood systems in these areas but also to develop alternative strategies. The effective implementation of both the CBD and UNCCD presents a challenge and an opportunity for those countries that are affected by drought and desertification, particularly in ensuring that available resources are used in an efficient manner, without duplication of effort.

30. In its decision IV/16, the Conference of the Parties of CBD decided that "dryland, Mediterranean, arid, semi-arid, grassland and savannah ecosystems" would be a subject for in-depth consideration at its fifth meeting. Accordingly, the CBD Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technological and Technical Advise (SBSTTA), at its fourth session, examined the first version of the relevant document prepared by the secretariat. As a follow-up to that document, SBSTTA adopted decision IV/3, in which it requested the CBD secretariat to prepare, in collaboration with the secretariat of the UNCCD, a draft programme of work on dryland, Mediterranean, arid, semi-arid, grassland and savannah ecosystems.

31. During the period between the fourth and fifth sessions of SBSTTA, the UNCCD secretariat worked in

close cooperation with the secretariat of the CBD in the preparation of the draft programme of work, conveying its views to the liaison group set up for that purpose. This consultation process led to the elaboration of a document (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/5/9) containing the proposed programme of work. At its fifth session, SBSTTA adopted a decision in which it requested the Conference of the Parties to the CBD to adopt a programme of work on the thematic area, to be jointly developed by the CBD and UNCCD secretariats.

32. The UNCCD and the CBD secretariats jointly organized, during the fifth session of SBSTTA, a workshop/brainstorming session with delegations, to discuss their views on the joint work programme. Emphasis was placed on field-level coordination of activities for effective implementation of the programme. The national action plan frameworks were considered as important entry points for the success of country-level activities of the programme. Delegations expressed their wish to see the development of synergies at the local level and the elimination of duplication of effort among the various actors involved in implementation.

33. Within the joint work programme, the secretariats of CBD and UNCCD will support the strengthening and coordination of policies and instruments that will promote the development of synergistic and complementary approaches in the implementation of the environmental conventions at the country level, through, inter alia, demonstrable cases of convergence of objectives. The CBD and UNCCD will also support the development of policies that promote participatory decision-making practices and the best mix of scientific and traditional knowledge in the sustainable and multiple use of biodiversity of dry and sub-humid lands and in the diversification of means of production.

34. Finally, as agreed in the recent UNCCD/CBD Memorandum of Understanding, which provides one of the most recent examples of the utilization of complementarities, the secretariats have continued their consultations regarding the organization of a joint workshop to assist countries in identifying viable and efficient means for addressing issues of awareness-raising, public education, information requirements, training and implementation mechanisms jointly for the two conventions. Both secretariats share the view that the workshop should be designed as a national forum for debate and exchange of information on experience gained and progress achieved in the processes envisaged under the two conventions.

35. Accordingly, the UNCCD and CBD secretariats envisage the involvement of major national stakeholders in the proceedings of the workshop. Priority would be given to the ministries directly in charge of the implementation of each convention and their respective focal points; and an invitation would also be extended to other relevant public authorities with mandates in strategic fields associated with the implementation process of both conventions, such as training, information, and scientific research. Active participation of non-governmental organizations and the media is seen as indispensable.

B. Climate change/desertification

36. Trends of desertification have an impact on the global carbon reservoir and carbon sinks. In this sense, desertification contributes to global warming. It is predicted that an increase in global temperature of 1-2 degrees Celsius by 2030-2050 will result in climate variations in regions affected by desertification, causing higher evaporation, decreased soil moisture and increased land degradation in the Middle East and arid parts of Asia; increasing drought frequency in Africa; and increasing the vulnerability of arid and semi-arid lands to desertification. Thus, while global climate change is expected to exacerbate regional and local desertification processes, the causes and results of desertification, in turn, also contribute to global climate change, mainly through their effect on vegetation.

37. The secretariats of the UNCCD and UNFCCC have engaged in periodic consultations with a view to better defining areas with potential for immediate collaboration. Given the different natures of the two processes and the different degrees of their implementation, collaboration has focused on an exchange of information and joint participation in technical and scientific meetings. The CCD secretariat participated in the Workshop on Impacts of Climate Change, held in Bonn in 1999, where it made a presentation on the impact of climate change on countries in arid and semi-arid areas, forested areas and areas liable to forest decay, and areas liable to drought and desertification.

38. The UNFCCC contributed to various UNCCD documents, participated in meetings dealing, for example, with linkages between desertification and climate change, and participated in discussions in workshops on issues of common interest, such as articles 4.8 and 4.9 of the UNCCD.

39. The UNCCD secretariat also engaged in consultations with the UNFCCC, with a view to developing a memorandum of understanding that would identify priority areas of cooperation. Such areas might include joint activities at the national level, data and information management, training and national communications.

40. The UNCCD secretariat participated in the twelfth session of the UNFCCC Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) and the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI), held in June 2000. Of particular relevance to the UNCCD were agenda items on land use, land use change, forestry, and items of discussion in the Kyoto Protocol which deal with the Clean Development Mechanism with respect to land degradation issues.

C. Biological diversity/climate change

41. The CBD and UNFCCC secretariats are making plans to cooperate with respect to forest biological diversity, particularly with respect to the potential impact of aforestation, reforestation, forest degradation and deforestation on forest biological diversity and on other ecosystems, especially in the context of the Kyoto Protocol. The CBD secretariat also intends to cooperate with the UNFCCC secretariat and other relevant organizations on coral bleaching, consistent with relevant decisions of the CBD at the fifth session of the Conference of the Parties.

42. In decisions adopted at that session, which took place from 16 to 26 May 2000 in Nairobi, the Conference requested strengthened cooperation and collaboration on various issues between the two conventions. The issues raised will be examined. UNFCCC also welcomes the initiative of biodiversity-related convention secretariats to strengthen the cooperation among them.

D. Biodiversity-related conventions

43. One environmental issue that calls for early coordination is the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. Consideration is being given, in dealing with this issue, to the need for a much higher degree of decentralization and the adoption of a more regional approach, with actions directed at achieving a higher degree of regional cooperation and regional policy coordination in the policy areas that are common to all biodiversity areas.

44. The secretariat of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands has been taking vigourous steps to encourage its administrative authorities (national focal points) to build close working relationships with their counterparts for the other conventions at the national level. Follow-up assessment and tangible progress of these various relationships have shown that the initiatives have been beneficial to all parties concerned.

45. The secretariats of the Ramsar Convention and the CBD drafted a second joint work plan for the period 2000-2001, which was reviewed by the CBD's Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice at its fifth session, in February 2000. The meeting endorsed the plan and supported a new format for national reports under the CBD, a format that should advance future efforts to harmonize national reporting. The CBD secretariat, together with the secretariats of the Ramsar Convention, CITES, the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and the World Heritage Convention, commissioned the UNEP/World Conservation Monitoring Centre to undertake a feasibility study for a harmonized information management infrastructure for biodiversity-related treaties. The feasibility study proposed a series of steps to be taken by the secretariats of the conventions to investigate options for harmonizing reporting procedures under the five conventions.

46. The Ramsar Bureau will be working with the UNFCCC secretariat to prepare an official document for submission to SBSTTA and to UNFCCC Conference of the Parties at its sixth session, to be held in The Hague in November 2000. The Ramsar secretariat has also been active in the UNCCD process, looking to identify potential synergies and define viable fields for long-term joint cooperation. At present, the UNCCD and the Ramsar secretariats are reviewing existing possibilities for developing, through

Ramsar's ongoing programme of work, activities that could be developed within the framework of the territorial platform offered by the UNCCD's national action plans and conceived as local area development programmes.

47. The CITES secretariat continues its efforts not only to increase cooperation with the other biodiversity-related conventions but also to enhance mutual understanding and cooperation with the Convention's "technical partners". These partners include the UNEP Conservation Monitoring Centre, the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the Wildlife Trade Monitoring Programme of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF/TRAFFIC). CITES aims at increasing coordination in the following key areas: capacity-building, training, awareness-raising, fundraising and regionalization.

IV. Trade and multilateral environmental agreements

48. As recognized in recent international meetings, promoting trade, protecting the global environment and achieving sustainable development require enhanced international coordination and cooperation in policy-making and implementation related to multilateral trade and environment agreements. At its eighth session, the Commission on Sustainable Development identified priorities for future work which include making trade and environment policies mutually supportive, strengthening institutional cooperation, capacity-building, and promoting partnerships. Similarly, the Global Ministerial Environment Forum, hosted by UNEP in Malmö, Sweden, in May 2000, encouraged a balanced and integrated approach to trade and environment policies in pursuit of sustainable development and recognized an urgent need for reinvigorated international cooperation.

49. There is increasing recognition of the need for research and consensus-building, enhancement of international cooperation, and identifying and implementing new and more coordinated procedures for international policy-making on trade and environment linkages. A more coherent and integrated approach to trade and environment policy-making can only be achieved through constructive dialogue based on a broader awareness and understanding of the complex linkages between trade, environment and development. Such enhanced understanding and awareness can help inform the implementation of existing multilateral environmental agreements and the negotiation of new ones and contribute to closer cooperation among such agreements, and between them and the World Trade Organization (WTO).

50. Beyond seeking a stronger integration of trade and environment policies embodied in multilateral trade agreements and multilateral environmental agreements, some Governments are exploring how potential conflicts between the trade and environment legal regimes can be effectively managed. Both WTO agreements and 20 of the more than 200 multilateral environmental agreements that exist today permit parties to use trade-restrictive measures to protect the environment. However, between two countries conflicts can arise over the use of a trade measure supported by a multilateral environmental agreement when both are members of WTO but only one is a party to the agreement. In such cases, the use of a trade measure permitted under the agreement may not be supported by WTO agreements, potentially resulting in a WTO dispute. Thus, some Governments argue that mechanisms or measures to resolve potential conflicts between the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements and WTO agreements should be established. However, others contend that such measures are unnecessary since a trade dispute related to WTO has not arisen to date and few multilateral environmental agreements regulate trade or contain specific trade provisions.

51. A number of initiatives are seeking to advance the understanding of the relationship between trade rules and multilateral environmental agreements and to encourage greater cooperation between relevant institutions and policy makers, at both the national and international levels. For example, in June 1999, UNEP convened a workshop with the secretariats of UNEP-administered environmental conventions and the secretariat of WTO which sought to enhance understanding of their respective underlying principles; clarify institutional and operational aspects of their mandates; and discuss issues of mutual concern, including how coherence between trade and environmental agreements could be improved. The meeting led to a series of events, combined with analytical work, including two informal meetings between the secretariats, held in April and July 2000, combined with a high-level panel discussion on relevant issues at the eighth session of the Commission

on Sustainable Development, in April 2000. The discussions revealed the need to move into a more proactive phase of cooperation between the secretariats. Further meetings to identify measures to increase synergies and reduce potential tensions between multilateral trade and environmental agreements will be convened by UNEP in September and October 2000. Additionally, these topics remain as active agenda items for the regular sessions of the WTO Committee on Trade and Environment.

52. UNEP has also worked to enhance its bilateral partnership with WTO. In November 1999, during the WTO Ministerial Conference in Seattle, a framework for cooperation between the two organizations was established. The framework emphasizes continued and enhanced collaboration, information exchange, consultation, and participation in each other's activities and capacity-building efforts.

53. In April 2000, UNEP and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) launched the Capacity-building Task Force on Trade, Environment and Development (CBTF). Over a three-year period, the UNEP/UNCTAD Task Force will attempt to strengthen the capacities of countries, particularly developing countries and countries with economies in transition, effectively to address trade/environment/development issues at the national level and to participate effectively in trade/environment/development deliberations at the international level. Beginning in October 2000, in participating countries, the Task Force will engage stakeholders from all sectors of society in research, training, country studies and policy dialogue. Its activities will focus on enhancing understanding of the linkages between trade, environment and development, leading to the formulation and implementation of integrated strategies and policies to maximize the benefits of increasing trade and trade liberalization in those countries and to minimize their negative impacts.

V. Conclusion

54. In light of intergovernmental decisions highlighting the linkages between the various environmental issues and the need for continuing policy coherence and greater scientific understanding of linkages between environmental issues, concrete actions and tangible results are being achieved in exploiting synergies in the implementation of the environmental and environment-related conventions. The process initiated by the General Assembly at its fifty-third session has progressed significantly and enlarged the international community's confidence in deriving maximum benefits from its investments in the system of legal environmental instruments, without detracting from the individual focuses and mandates of the autonomous conventions.

55. Consideration should be given to undertaking a comprehensive integrated assessment of progress in the implementation of environmental and environment-related conventions on the occasion of the 10-year review of the implementation of Agenda 21 in the year 2002. The assessment should take into account the substantial benefits that can be derived from improved coordination and collaboration among environmental and environment-related conventions, and make progress on improving the harmonization of nomenclature and legal environmental principles; methodologies for cost/benefit analysis and scientific assessment; modalities for information exchange; joint thematic reporting and streamlined national reporting; and the development of performance indicators for measuring progress in implementation. Moreover, the emerging importance of globalization processes suggests that the assessment should also assess the linkages between trade and environment and identify specific areas where greater coordination and cooperation is needed between trade and environment legal regimes, institutions and policy makers. Such an assessment could provide a major contribution to the 10-year review of the implementation of Agenda 21 in the year 2002.

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Nineteenth Special Session, Supplement No. 2* (A/S-19/33), chap. III, resolution S-19/2, annex.

[2] *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigenda), vol. I, resolution I, annex II.

[3] Ibid., annex I.

[4] Published by UNEP, the World Bank, and the United States National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in 1998.

[5] *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development*, ... , vol. I, resolution I, annex III.